

“Let There Be Light: Dassault Systèmes’ New Boston Campus Promises to Brighten Workplace Culture”

By Darren Garnick

It was hailed in the Greater Boston media as the biggest real estate deal of 2010, but the biggest deal of all may be how the new Dassault Systèmes’ campus impacts the lives of its employees.

The 27-acre facility, which includes a gourmet cafeteria, fitness center, and a beautiful outdoor courtyard, will be most striking for its dedication to capturing natural light. Large panel windows dominate the architecture, drawing the sun’s rays deep into interior office space. Walled offices are built away from the windows, so there is egalitarian access to scenery -- regardless of your job title.

“You might be 35 feet away from the windows and you can still see over the workspace into the greenery. No matter where you are sitting, you’ll have a view of the outside,” says Sara Ross, of Elkus Manfredi Architects. “There really isn’t a bad place to sit in the building.”



Built into a hill overlooking the Cambridge Reservoir in Waltham, the curved glass office complex takes on the look of a sleek, modern airport terminal from the outside. But to avoid the “lost” feeling of walking down long hallways, the building is sliced with vertical corridors linking opposite ends of the windowed perimeter. These “coffee connection” corridors, which indeed will offer hot beverages, are intended to encourage conversation and “spontaneous collaboration” with co-workers.

According to Al Bunshaft, managing director of Dassault Systèmes North America, the new campus will improve both the employee and customer experience in addition to raising the company’s profile in the heart of the Route 128 technology belt.

“Dassault Systèmes is moving from a mostly traditional office environment to a more modern and collaborative space,” he says. “Our new campus is intended to unleash the creative spirit in our people and our guests. We want to create a healthy work environment where people will love the space they work in and as a result be more motivated and creative.”

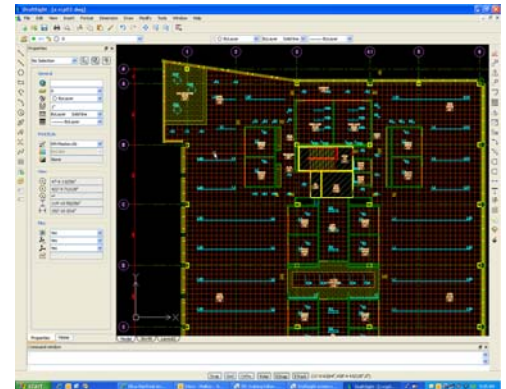
“Our company is built on our intellectual capital,” Bunshaft adds. “We strive to hire and retain the best people in the world. We’re working to create a space which reflects that and which will motivate people to love where they work and love the work they do in that space. The ultimate beneficiary will be our customers.”

The Dassault Systèmes' Boston Campus will bring hundreds of employees currently in Concord and Lowell, Massachusetts under one roof for greater efficiency and collaboration. Other features of the new campus include:

- The Briefing Center with conference rooms for company meetings and customer use.
- Training classrooms for Dassault Systèmes' customers and partners.
- A bright, spacious lunchroom with high ceilings that could also be used for company meetings or presentations.
- Outdoor patios with picnic tables, benches and wifi.
- The Gallery and Pre-Function Area, an open glass-enclosed space ideal for nighttime receptions, to showcase new products or project a client's logo on the wall.
- An indoor parking garage.
- Full fitness facilities with showers and locker rooms.
- Game rooms and coffee lounges.
- Landscaped grounds with a waterfall.
- Dedicated preferred parking for bicycles, carpoolers and green vehicles.

“We'll be offering many opportunities for employees to get outside their traditional work spaces,” Bunshaft promises.

Equally exciting is the fact that several of Dassault Systèmes' solutions are being deployed in the design/build out of this new workspace. The interior design was entirely planned out in DraftSight, Dassault Systèmes' free 2D CAD product that was released last summer.



Elkus Manfredi Architects -- whose recent projects include the InterContinental Boston Hotel, the Harvard University Graduate Commons, Downtown Disney in Anaheim, Miami Worldcenter, and Seattle's Pacific Place -- have traditionally relied on AutoCAD 2D.

But for this project, they and collaborating engineering firms used DraftSight for drawing floor plans as well as plumbing, wiring, sprinkler and HVAC diagrams.

“We did all our initial planning with it,” says Elkus Manfredi's Ross. “It was very easy to learn. We're now using it solely on this project, but we are looking at considering it for other projects as they come up.”

Ross has been using DraftSight as she tracks and fulfills the strict environmental requirements to try to earn a LEED Silver certification for the interior design. The exterior already has earned LEED Gold certification, a prestigious industry award recognizing “green” buildings that save energy, conserve water, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, recycle materials and improve indoor air quality.

LEED, an acronym for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a voluntary certification process that demonstrates a company's commitment to conserving natural resources. The program is overseen by the U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, D.C.

According to Patrick Mays, Dassault Systèmes' vice president for construction industry strategy, every contractor, subcontractor, designer and vendor involved in this project was encouraged to use DraftSight as well as Dassault Systèmes' SolidWorks whenever possible.

"Our philosophy was that we should try to take advantage of the technology we have. Before we even start construction, let's start building a story to tell," he said. "The architects had already been hired and were planning to use AutoCAD 2D. But they hadn't started yet. So I just suggested they give us a try."

Mays says that SolidWorks-designed products integrated into the building will include the cooling equipment on the roof, the HVAC system, the electrical and plumbing systems, light fixtures, office furniture and the backup diesel generators.

"We're prepared," he says. "Even if we get struck by lightning, the power won't go out."

The first Dassault Systèmes' employees are expected to begin moving to Waltham in October, with the majority of the workforce relocating by the end of December. But Mays says he's hoping every employee can visit their new digs early with a 3DVIA virtual tour similar to the one demonstrated earlier this year at the SolidWorks World User Event.

The 3DVIA software will convert DraftSight drawings of the campus into 3D models that the employees' avatars can walk through.

"It's similar to Second Life," Mays says. "We want to create a realistic simulation tour this July for our employees, who'll be able to take a sneak peek at the break room and conference center and see what their new office will look like with furniture."

Stay tuned for more details!

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